

Puddle Jumping

By Lila Santiago

Franklin stared out the window. There wasn't much to look at, but he stared out anyway. It was raining again. The sound of raindrops echoed endlessly as they hit the window of Franklin's tiny house. Franklin sighed. He hated rain. Rain reminded him of Daniel. Daniel is who he wishes he could forget. But he watched the rain just the same.

Daniel Brown lived right to Franklin. They went to the same school. But they never talked much. At age 10, they had other things on their minds like school and sports.

One night, there was a big storm. Storms were common-Oregon had storms almost every week. The windows shook and the ceiling creaked. Franklin's mother held him close. That night, thunder echoed and lightning attacked trees and electric poles. Franklin squeezed his eyes shut.

In the morning, outside was a mess. The air was damp and the grass was covered with dew. Broken branches and garbage cans were scattered across his yard. A tree had fallen, and blocked the road a few doors down. School was canceled for the week.

Franklin hated school, but at home he was incredibly bored. On the third day, his mother handed him a rain coat and boots. "Go play," she said. "Those puddles will be fun to splash in." So he took the coat and boots and went outside. Since he lived at the bottom of a hill, the puddles were quite big. He splashed and splashed. After a half hour, a boy appeared from next door, wearing a coat and boots.

"Hi," he said. "Can I play too?" Franklin smiled.

"Sure!" The boy grinned and ran up to the puddles with Franklin. They splashed and laughed. When the sun was sinking in the sky, and their mothers called them in for supper, they said good bye.

"Thanks for playing with me," said Franklin. "My name is Franklin. What is yours?" The boy smiled and answered.

"My name is Daniel."

After that, the two boys were inseparable. When school resumed, they played at recess, and ate lunch together.

Years passed, and Franklin and Daniel were in their last year of high school. They chose to attend the same college so that their friendship could remain intact. They walked through the gates of their new school on their first day, hand in hand. They studied together everyday after their classes. They left notes in each other's dorms.

When they graduated, they lived only a few apartments away. Even when they both were in serious relationships, they spoke often and managed to find time for weekly adventures. When Franklin got married, Daniel was his best man. Franklin was Daniel's too. It was great. Until it wasn't.

One day, in late November, Daniel was driving back home from Franklin's house. It was midnight, and the visibility was low. He started driving up a bridge. It was raining heavily, and the roads were slippery. Daniel drove too fast. The car skidded and then flipped. Daniel didn't make it.

Franklin was never the same after Daniel's funeral. He wasn't happy. He wasn't adventurous. He was sad. So very sad. His wife died a few years later, leaving him completely

alone. Now, when he looked at the rain, he remembered the day when he and Daniel first met. The day his life truly began. He also recalls the day his heart was shattered.

Today, he squints his eyes to the road. He sees something new. He gasps. He smiles and his eyes well. He sees two boys playing in a puddle in front of his house. Just like he and Daniel all those years ago.

Franklin studies the boys more. They look around 8 years old. They splash and jump and squeal, letting the rain hit their smiling faces. After a few hours, they go home. Franklin prepares bed, but he can't stop thinking about the boys outside. After a while, he drifts off to sleep.

The next day, the boys return. Franklin watched them for hours in the rain. They frolicked and laughed until dusk. Then the two boys started walking home. Before he could realize it, Franklin grabbed his cane and limped outside. "Wait!" He called. The boys look at him confused. "Can you join me for tea?" The boys smiled and nodded. Franklin leads them inside. They sit down on his small couch, and Franklin gives them some chamomile tea. Then he sat down in his favorite green chair and told them everything.

Two hours later, Carson and Jack said goodbye to Franklin. "We will visit soon," they said.

Franklin smiled. It was like a piece of Daniel was still with him. "Thanks, Daniel." Franklin said.